

The Social Spread of the Handshake in 18th & 19th Century England

By Dr. Penelope Corfield

Emeritus Professor of History, Royal Holloway

2.30pm Saturday 17th October 2026

at Trinity Methodist Church, Chelmsford CM1 2XB.

Visitors and prospective members warmly welcomed

– £5. Booking not required.

Background:-

The egalitarian handshake has a long past and a bright future. It was first used in international diplomacy; but later spread into daily use within urban/commercial circles in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, led by England.

In this talk, Penelope Corfield explores the new custom of shaking hands between men and women from diverse class backgrounds; and probes the gesture's symbolic meanings. Lastly, she predicts the handshake's spreading international use, as a greeting that is warm and friendly but not overly physically intrusive.

Resume of talk:-

Penelope J. Corfield is Emeritus Professor of History at Royal Holloway, University of London. She writes on British history in the long eighteenth century, including especially *The Georgians: The Deeds & Misdeeds of Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Yale UP., 2022; paperback 2023). She has also published, with co-author Tim Hitchcock, *Becoming a Historian: An Informal Guide* (Univ. London Press, 2022). In addition, Penelope studies human history over the very long term, as shown in her latest book: *Time-Space: We Are All in It Together* (Austin Macauley: London, 2025) - available also in ebook and Audio-book.